CONFRONTATION IN DERADICALISATION INTERVENTIONS (SOME CHALLENGES)

It can be assumed that in view of the specific nature of some interventions (especially the most coercive ones) specific concerns regarding physical or verbal violence directed towards the practitioners, who carry out the interventions, might arise.

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Introduction

In a standard mainstream intervention, it is fundamental not to condemn a client's aggressive behaviour and let him/her believe that it is normal to have such feelings; to value the client's search for help. Regarding deradicalisation interventions for violent radicals and terrorists, however, a violent nature or potential towards violence might pose a serious concern or even danger to the frontline worker. It does not seem that analysis or the evaluation of interventions has gone very far on this matter. At the same time, as for any mainstream social intervention, deradicalisation interventions must consider the main role of a social worker as that of an enabler and empathic mediator.

Social workers under stress

Recent anecdotal evidence and limited empirical data suggest that incidents concerning physical and emotional violence by clients toward social workers are numerous and could actually rise. A systematic, large-scale and comparative study should be critically conducted on this matter. Risk factors for violent behaviour, and the ways in which incidents psychologically and physically affect frontline workers, do not seem to be particularly well-known, especially incidence prevalence, and the nature of violence toward social workers. In theory, by reason of the specific nature of their clients, deradicalisation interventions could potentially be among the most sensitive cases, though here again, there is a lack of data and documented cases.

The incidence of client-to-worker violence has been evaluated by studying the responses of social workers to a self-administered questionnaire, which consisted of 19 forced-choice items relating to types of violence experienced, location of violent episode, insurance coverage, and in service training dealing with client violence. The types of violence found were in the areas of physical violence, verbal threats, property damage, and total destruction of property.

Operational challenges

Any intervention with particularly radicalised clients – in an open environment or in a total institution – could pose specific problems. For instance, the potential for a situation to escalate to violence can seriously hamper successfully confronting violent radical ideology or hate speech with a simple counter-narrative. Furthermore, it is likely that in the most dissociated or sophisticated radical personalities, the norms and values they display are so deeply enrooted that it may be difficult to challenge them . Specifically, the radicalisation facilitator or ideologue that decisively contributed to an individual's radicalisation, will be the most difficult and challenging client to work with, at least on a strict counter-narrative level, considering his level of indoctrination. By contrast, and again in theory, it may be easier to intervene with the simple radical 'followers' or foot-soldiers.

The social-worker acting in deradicalisation interventions may face more specific challenges than their counterparts in mainstream programmes. During such interventions, and again due to the specific nature of the clients, violence - both verbal and physical - can manifest itself in many ways – real or symbolic.

It should be noted that an intervention itself can be very coercive and legally constraining. The social-worker is not only a practitioner who may face hazardous situations in their daily activity. They are also part of a system that might imply a symbolic expression of violence through the use of power (such as defining the time-schedules, the place, conducting interviews, etc.) – though it compared to physical or verbal violence expressed by the client toward social workers.

Furthermore, the profile of social workers themselves can contradict a radicalised individual's beliefs. For instance, the involvement of an unveiled Western woman, as a staff member, can strongly contradict the norms and values of a radical individual involved in a deradicalisation intervention. Similarly, the choice of a member of a visible minority to work with white supremacists can raise serious concerns, not only for the security of this social-worker, but also for the success of the programme itself.

Finally, it is clearly up to the intervention managers to select their front-liners' profile, keeping in mind that choosing between similarity or difference with clients can have various concrete consequences. Similar identities between the clients and the practitioners could facilitate the intervention in its first steps. On the other hand, given a suitable context, contradicting differences do not necessarily lead to confrontational situations, but can be a chance toward more open mindedness.

ANTI-CONFRONTATIONAL METHODS

Concept and frameworks/tools like assertiveness, contributive negotiation, or ethics of reciprocity help to address power-wielding clients in mainstream interventions. Their application and impact in deradicalisation interventions could be the same.

Assertiveness in front line intervention practice is a way of behaving that helps the social worker stand up for his rights while respecting the rights of the clients.

ASSERTIVE TECHNIQUES IN ACTION (BUFFALO UNIVERSITY):

- <u>Broken Record</u> - Be persistent and keep saying what you want over and over again without getting angry, irritated, or loud. Stick to your point.
- <u>Free Information</u> – Learn to listen to the other person and follow-up on free information people offer about themselves. This free information gives you something to talk about.
- <u>Self-Disclosure</u> – Assertively disclose information about yourself - how you think, feel, and react to the other person's information. This gives the other person information about you.
- <u>Fogging</u> – An assertive coping skill is dealing with criticism. Do not deny any criticism and do not counter-attack with criticism of your own.
- <u>Agree with the truth</u> – Find a statement in the criticism that is truthful and agree with that statement.
- <u>Agree with the odds</u> – Agree with any possible truth in the critical statement.
- <u>Agree in principle</u> – Agree with the general truth in a logical statement such as, "That makes sense."
- <u>Negative Assertion</u> – Assertively accept those things that are negative about yourself. Cope with your errors.
- <u>Workable Compromise</u> – When your self-respect is not in question offer a workable compromise

In *contributive negotiation*, each party must be attentive that neither of them succeeds at the expense of the other. It allows the parties to take into account the need for recognition and to manage the fragility of an agreement adopted in crisis. It also emphasises and accentuates the need to develop an approach that focuses on clarifying people's positions in order to make informed choices rather than maintaining the illusion of a win-win approach.

The parties consider that if they want to maintain quality relationships between them, each must be careful that they do not succeed at the expense of the other. 'Contribution' may, in certain agreements, mean stopping a particular non-normative behaviour. In social-work interventions, the contribution may go further and anticipate what may facilitate or promote the success of the other.

Reciprocity is an interactive system such that each party has both balanced rights and balanced duties. The ethics of reciprocity is the expectation that people will respond to each other in similar ways—responding to incentives from others with similar benevolence of their own, and responding to harmful, hurtful acts from others with either indifference or some form of retaliation.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is possible that the discrete nature of some deradicalisation interventions limits community and expert awareness of violence cases against social workers. However, the success and improvement of these interventions should require a systematic comparison of cases of violence as well as operational protocols and safeguards.

Some recommendations seem to be highly necessary for strategies and policies that social workers and agencies could institute to protect frontline workers from violence without compromising client services. Some best-practices could possibly be observed from comparable interventions in non-European countries (Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Yemen), etc., or from interventions with other 'sensitive clients'.

By the same token, US federal or local intervention programmes (including those that work to create violence-free zones, establish gang summits and truces, and rehabilitate gang members in juvenile detention and correctional facilities) would deserve to be carefully examined on this matter.

REFERENCE AND FURTHER READING

- Client Violence and Its Negative Impacts on Work Attitudes of Child Protection Workers Compared to Community Service Workers J Interpers Violence (2011) 26 (16): 3338-3360.

- Schultz, LeRoy G.The social worker as a victim of violence. Social Casework, Vol 68(4), Apr 1987, 240-244

- FBI definition: "A 'facilitator' knowingly provides one or more of a wide array of services to other operatives that enable the execution of terrorist plots, training, travel, or financing. Such activity might include setting up bank accounts, acquiring or producing false identification or travel documentation, aiding travel, disbursing funds, simple procurement of materials, or enabling communications via electronic means or by coordinating couriers. A facilitator who participates in a conspiracy without knowing the final object of the conspiracy or even knowing that a conspiracy exists should be referred to as an unwitting co-optee." (http://cryptome.org/fbi-ct-lexicon.pdf)

- FBI definition: "An 'ideologue' or 'propagandist' establishes, promotes, or disseminates justifications for violent extremism, often through manipulation of primary text materials such as religious texts or historical accounts that establish grievances. He or she might not have strong links to any terrorist organisation or be integrated into an organisation's command structure. Unless he or she directly advocates specific acts of violence, much of such an individual's activity might be constitutionally protected."
(http://cryptome.org/fbi-ct-lexicon.pdf)

- http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/students/self-care/documents/exercises/Assertiveness_and_Nonassertiveness.pdf

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reciprocity_%28social_and_political_philosophy%29

- https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/171154.pdf